TRANSFORMING MINISTRY WITH

AFRICAN AMERICAN INNER CITY YOUTH

A Proffesional Project

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by

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ABSTRACT

Transforming Ministry with African American

Inner City Youth

by

Tehran Frazier

Are African American churches doing enough to help our young people in the inner city? Are we addressing the right problems but using the wrong methods? Are the methods we use in ministering to inner city youth compatible to their culture which appears to be a culture in opposition to our religious traditions? Have we been inconsistent in our ministry to inner city youth? This project addresses these and many other questions in an effort to support the thesis that African American churches desiring to do effective ministry with inner city youth must use innovative methods which identify with their culture. These methods tend to be non-traditional and are viewed by many National Baptist churches as being too secular to be included in their programs for inner city ministry. However, biblical and empirical evidence support the view that Christianity must undergo a process of inculturation if it is to be relevant to a changing people living in a changing world.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of why transforming and innovative methods of ministry with inner city youth are both relevant and necessary. Chapter 2 is an attempt to deconstruct a theology for inner city ministry and define the

role and mission of the Black Church in the inner city. Chapter 3 focuses on African American inner city families and the problems which alienate and keep them from participating in the life of the church. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the transforming culture of inner city youth and offer alternative methods of ministry relative to their environment. Chapter 6 emphasizes the importance of empowering inner city youth to do ministry and illustrates how they are more knowledgeable and better equipped in solving the problems that are unique to their environment. Chapter 7 summarizes the need for National Baptist churches to re-examine their traditions and ideologies that place little value on the contributions of inner city youth and fail to recognize the uniqueness of their culture. A final challenge is given for inner city churches to change those traditions that serve no purpose in meeting the needs of inner city youth or risk the possibility of losing them.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Too many of our African American youth in the inner city refuse to attend our churches because they feel unwelcome and strangers to a religious culture that fails to meet their needs. Still, others are leaving the church because they cannot identify with what is seen as its boring, repetitious programs and irrelevant religious traditions. African American churches in the inner city have, for the most part, failed to identify with the needs of inner city youth. Traditional methods of youth ministry practiced in African American Baptist churches consist primarily of religious education through use of denominationally approved books and resources, church sponsored programs, and revivals which benefit church members and their families. These methods may work well when used with children born into a religious family setting but are incompatible with cultures outside the boundaries of that setting.

The inner city is comprised of young people belonging to various groups with sub-cultures generic to a hostile environment. Therefore, African American churches desiring to do ministry with inner city youth should use innovative methods which identify with the culture of the young people who live there. Black churches in the inner city must adopt effective strategies for ministering with their youth or risk losing them to gangs, drugs, cults, and other destructive

lifestyles.

Inner city neighborhoods in the United States have undergone a dramatic transformation in the past twenty five years. The number of parents and children living in poverty, teenage pregnancies, female headed households, unemployment, welfare dependency, violent crimes, and drug abuse, has escalated. The church desiring to do ministry with inner city youth must have a voice louder and stronger than the negative voices they hear in the neighborhood. Any church mission designed to meet the needs of inner city youth must recognize the fact that poverty, hunger, violence, and sensualism make it difficult for them to hear the "Word of God."[1] Adverse conditions such as poverty and violence can also break one's spirit and will to survive. The people of God did not listen to the message of Moses that the Lord had heard their cry and would redeem them because they had a broken spirit.[2]

Living in an environment of poverty and crime is a cruel bondage that breaks the spirit within young people. These young people have a sense of hopelessness that nothing will ever change for the good. What we often describe as pathological behavior could possibly be the inner spirit of our young people crying out for help; they need love and a purpose and reason to live. The church that turns a deaf ear

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[1]George G. Hunter, How to Reach Secular People (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 61.

[2]Exod. 6:9

to the cries of inner city youth participate in a systemic evil which perpetuates the suffering in our inner cities. African American churches in the inner city that refuse to lend an ear to the cries of their young people for help are a part of the problem and not the solution.

If Black churches are to succeed in doing ministry with inner city youth, they must provide young people with a sense of pride, family, identity, and community. The church must relate to the culture of inner city youth and not necessarily try to change it. In spite of all the negative, there are many positive things can come from the culture of inner city youth in terms of their art, music, creative dance and their ability to organize and unite peer groups to work towards a common goal. Black churches must recognize that young people in the inner city have much to contribute to the effort of solving problems in their community if given a chance to use the gifts and talents generic to their own culture.

Young people in the inner city are looking for a new value system because they cannot find any evidence in past history and tradition to guide their behavior today. Religious traditions of Black Baptist churches have primarily failed to meet the needs of inner city youth and help them to survive the asphalt jungles of the city. As a church, we must become more flexible in our ministry to inner city youth and be willing to change our traditional ways of doing ministry if we expect to reach a generation of young people who are

considered un-reachable.

Scope, Limitations, and Procedures for Integration

This project focuses primarily on the claim that traditional methods of ministry do not work as well with inner city youth. The evidence to support this claim is provided through the use of empirical data and critical analysis. The empirical data is a result of my observation of and participation in various pro-active models of ministry with African American inner city youth. One such model, often referred to in this project, is the ReHope Youth Center of Kansas City, Kansas where I was director of ministry for seven years.

My experiences in ministering with the children at the center is used to compare, contrast, and critically evaluate those theories that support the use of traditional and non-traditional methods of ministry with inner city youth. This project does not attempt to offer any new theories or effective models for ministry with inner city youth but focuses primarily on supporting the thesis that non-traditional rather than traditional methods work better.

Definitions of Major Terms

For the purposes of this project, the term "inner city" is used in reference to the transitional residential area located near the central and secondary business districts of a city. The inner city is comprised of neighborhoods heavily populated by minorities and other "blue collar" working class

citizens which distinguishes the inner city from suburbia. The term "ministry" is defined as the actual needs, both spiritual and physical, which are met those who are led by the spirit of God. The terms "transforming" and "innovative" are used in reference to those methods of ministry designed to adapt to the culture of inner city youth. "Traditional methods of ministry" refers to the denominationally sponsored youth programs and revivals which are passed down through the generations of baptist religious cultural practices. These practices were designed, primarily, to benefit the children of Baptist church members and meet the elder's expectations of a Christian lifestyle. The "culture" of inner city youth is defined as those beliefs and practices learned by inner city children in response to conditions within the family and community.

The church is referred to as the people of God who are led by the spirit of Jesus Christ in meeting the needs of others. The role of the church in reference to this project is interpreted as being an agent for spiritual, social, and economic liberation. The African American inner city family is my primary point of reference because it is the community of which I am most familiar. However, in no way do I intend to limit the use of this information to those communities alone. This project could be useful to all ethnic congregations in the inner city as well as suburban and rural congregations because problems common to African American

inner city youth are common to all youth.

My target audience is the African American National Baptist Convention of which I am a member. However, the information on effective ministry with inner city youth could prove useful to all congregations who face similar problems in ministering with youth of all ages and cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER 2

The Church's Mission in the Inner City

A Theology of the City

The word city appears in the Bible 1,227 times with early references describing it negatively.[1] The first city is associated with Cain, a murderer who rejected God's protection and built a city as a substitute for Eden which was lost. There are some who believe that Cain is a prototype of all city builders who rebel against God and attempt to build their own social, political, economic, and moral defenses in defiance of God's will. From the building of the tower of Babel to the destruction of Sodom, the early biblical accounts of the city were primarily negative.

There are some positive images of the city in the Bible which are evidenced in the book of Joshua. Joshua is directed by God to designate certain cities as cities of refuge built to protect those who were responsible for the accidental death of another. The prophets were aware of the potential for evil in the city but were equally appreciative of the potential for good. Ezekiel had a vision of restoration for the city and reached for the highest name possible for the restored people.[2] The city of Jerusalem was a symbol of God's presence and the ultimate place of worship. Mount Zion (which is

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[1]Francis DuBose, How Churches Grow in an Urban World (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 108.

[2]Ezek. 48:35

interpreted as being the Church) is referred to as being the city of the great king and the habitation of the most high.[3]

The biblical story begins in a garden but ends in a city. The Bible never seeks to return to Eden; even Abraham looked for a city.[4] The story concerning Jonah is one about God's love and effort to save a city through the preaching and teaching of his prophet Jonah. Jonah's theology for the city was wrong because he assumed that his enemies who lived there and the enemies of God were the same. Jonah failed to understand that God's love has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, no matter where they live. Jesus wept over the city Jerusalem when he contemplated its future and the destruction of the temple of God. Joseph worked in a pagan city and used the instruments of the state to feed the entire Middle East. Special blessings were extended to those city dwellers who had faith in God. The example of Rahab, in the city of Jericho, is an illustration of how God is moved to protect those who show evidence of faith in God and a willingness to serve.

The biblical evidence leaves us without a doubt that God has never forsaken our cities and always has a plan of salvation and deliverance for those who live there. Even in the example of Sodom, God is open to negotiation and prayer to save it from destruction which gives evidence that God is

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[3]Ps. 48:1-52.

[4]DuBose, 108.

concerned and cares about the city.[5]

Today's society has given the city a bad rap because most of the news generated from the media concerning the city is negative. There are some good things happening in our cities that never make the six o'clock news. The lame can walk, the blind can see, the hungry are filled, and to the poor, the gospel is preached each day in our cities across America. The church's urban ministry was rooted in Luke 4:18. Jesus proclaimed that the Holy Spirit anoints and empowers ministries that are directed towards the poor and broken hearted.

The message of the church can be appealing to the poor in our cities because it treats sin and evil as tangible realities and offers deliverance from the presence of sickness and evil. By 1965, seventy five percent of African Americans had moved to the city because of expanded employment opportunities created by the new world wars and intensifying racial oppression in the south.[6]

The inner city has become a victim of drastic transition, characterized by slums and other undesirable aspects of urban society. The migration of the skilled middle class to the suburbs and the poor unskilled from rural communities and other countries has transformed a once stable urban

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[5]Raymond J. Bakke, A Theology as Big as the City (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 5.

[6]Robert M. Franklin, Church and City: African American Christianity's Ministry (n.p., n.d.).

residential area into a transitional community. The inability of the inner city church to cope with this change has brought the greatest crisis in the history of the American church.[7]

Some Black churches have decided to leave the inner city in an effort to escape its problems. We have biblical evidence that this does not work. In Genesis, Lot discovered that the sins of Sodom were not external but internal and although his family escaped the city they did not escape the sins. Joseph worked in a pagan city and used the instruments of the state to feed the entire Middle East. Paul's ministry to the early churches were primarily urban ministries; his letters to the churches in Asia Minor were all located in cities because this is where most of the Jews lived.[8] Today, seventy five percent of all Americans make their home in the city. Sociologically speaking, the inner cores of major cities have become a part of the third world. The population of these areas are without access to the basic resources of human life such as food, shelter, education, and employment. A permanent under-class is growing in most major cities. The transformation of older cities from centers of production and distribution of goods to centers of information exchange and service consumption has profoundly altered the capacity for cities to offer employment opportunities to the

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[7]DuBose, 18.

[8]Bakke, 6.

disadvantaged.[9]

The most educated and capable leaders in terms of business and politics tend to leave the inner city and move to the suburbs. This trend has created a shortage of professional leaders who are well informed of inner city problems and has depleted the economic base of most inner city institutions that rely on a healthy tax structure in order to provide adequate services. When income leaves the inner city the church also suffers and is often faced with a mission but no money to finance it.

If inner city churches are to survive, they must be able to adapt to the changes brought about by the exit of valuable human resources as well as the influx of new immigrant groups moving into the community. Hispanics, Asians, and Caribbean make up a growing population in many inner city neighborhoods and have cultural related needs that some churches are unable to meet. Many of these churches decide to leave rather than remain in neighborhoods where they cannot identify with the needs of the community.

I cannot understand why a congregation would decide to move from a community because of new immigrants without first trying to integrate the congregation with members from the new community into positions of leadership. In order for inner city churches to serve a growing community of young people, they must understand the nature of that community and be

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[9]Bakke, 9.

willing to welcome it. The question is, what do we mean by welcome? Does welcome mean we simply open our pews and invite young people to join us in worship? Do we open our Sunday Schools and insist that they attend in order to properly educate them in our religious culture? What about opening our pulpits and inviting young people to teach us their hopes, dreams and their ways of dealing with the pains and conflicts of life.

Some inner city churches try to relate to a diverse community's culture by adopting a goal of "unity in the midst of diversity." This goal, in my opinion, is an avoidance of the real issue. The real issue is the "sharing of power" and allowing other groups the freedom to participate fully in the life of our congregations. If a Black church, because of changes in the population, finds itself surrounded by Asian neighbors, it would make sense for the church to train and hire Asian ministers to meet the needs of its new neighbors.

My understanding of welcoming a new community into the life of the church involves the willingness to share power and authority. The Black church in the inner city must be willing to share power and authority if it truly believes in the "priesthood of all believers." Black churches that minister in the inner city today will discover that change is inevitable. These congregations must be able to adapt to a changing environment, recognize the diversity within their communities and be willing to welcome its members by treating

them as equals. Equality within community is a "Christian principle" biblically supported by the teachings of Paul who wrote that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female because we are all considered as one.[10] Paul also advised Timothy to let no man despise his youth and to be an example to all believers by living a spiritual life of faith, love, and purity.[11] Young people in the inner city feel despised, alienated, and rejected when not allowed to fully participate in the life of the church.

A Theology for Inner City Ministry

The church cannot ignore the historic tendency of concentrating on individual spiritual developments alone. Therefore, churches must focus more on family enrichment, Christian education, counseling and community organizing.[12] I believe that every activity in the church should be motivated and guided by the spirit but Baptist tradition has distinguished the Sunday morning worship service as being the "most spiritual hour" of the entire week. The individual decision to accept Christ is often considered to be the only spiritually motivated decision that one is capable of making. National Baptist churches must come to recognize and submit to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in community

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[10]Gal. 3:28

[11]1 Tim. 4:12

[12]Wallace Charles Smith, The Church in the Life of the Black Family (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985), 85.

organization and in every activity of the church in the inner city.

Urban churches by the thousands fail to see and serve the city as an interdependent whole; they are prone to identify themselves with provincial interests, private concerns, and tend to fragment divided cities even further. There is often a willingness to minister in an urban situation but because of new living patterns in the city, churches are confused as to how urban ministry is to be accomplished.[13]

Evangelical Christianity has acknowledged that individuals in the city ought to be saved. The problem is that our concept of salvation has been "other worldly" in its orientation. We have aimed to get people to heaven with too little interest in liberating them from earthly hells. Good news for the poor, release for the captives, liberty for the oppressed, and abundant life are all expressions of the salvation Jesus offers and have to do with the "here and now" as well as the "hereafter."[14]

Because of a slave mentality, African American Baptist churches have traditionally focused on heavenly rewards rather than earthly. This attitude is the result of a life of economic, social, and political oppression. It was this "pie in the sky" theology of the Black Church that caused many

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[13]Roger S. Greenway, "City Churches," in Discipling the City, ed. Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 61.

[14]Greenway, 65.

young people, like myself, to find the nearest exit. I give credit to Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement of the 1960s for changing my view of church. The sermons of King and other religious leaders of the 1960s talked about a God of justice who was on the side of the oppressed and was willing to set them free from bondage. The church was presented as being the community of God's people, working together as agents of liberation.

I prefer the community model of church because it emphasizes the church as being the people of God, equipped to serve, meeting needs everywhere in the name of Jesus. The focus for ministry would be on worship, training, and fellowship in order to produce spirit filled people to meet the needs of others. The goals of this type of church are personal where it strives to make each individual whole, equipped, and released into the world to minister. Jesus taught that the field of service is the world, therefore, the church should not confine the spiritual gifts to the sanctuary but equip the people to serve in the world.[15]

I agree with the understanding of J. Deotis Roberts who viewed the church as being a continuation of the ministry of Jesus in a community and in history. The apostles understood their mission as being sent forth to carry on the ministry of Jesus in and through the new community that Jesus had

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[15]Matt. 13:38.

founded.[16] We cannot, in my opinion, separate the church from the community, nor can we divide community from the inner city. The spirit of God is alive and working through inner city residents to meet the needs of the community which is the true definition of church.

I have witnessed the spirit of Christ working in inner city churches as agents of liberation, creating jobs for the poor, opening day care centers for children, food kitchens for the hungry, job training programs for the unemployed, and credit unions owned and operated by the church. These are all acts of liberation which can and should take place in inner city churches but are absent in far too many of our urban communities.

I believe reconciliation should come before liberation. If liberation is to be complete, one's soul must first be reconciled to God and to one's neighbor. A person who is not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ is not truly liberated because he/she is not free from selfish desires and motives. When a person accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior the self is crucified with Christ and the soul is liberated and now capable of unselfish love for one's neighbor. A community cannot claim to be Christian if it does not embody a ministry of reconciliation; however, reconciliation is not a reality in many urban churches. There is a theoretical openness to the

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[16]J. Deotis Roberts, The Prophethood of Black Believers (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 6.

rich and the poor but few of either find their way into the church. The economical, political, and social gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow in the inner city. The problem will never be solved as long as middle class suburbanites make their money in neighborhoods where they refuse to live or pay taxes.

Mainline protestant churches, located in the inner city, have even catered, primarily, to middle class economic, social, and cultural needs without responding to the needs of inner city residents. These churches often get in the way of themselves because they are dedicated to doing ministry within their own boundaries, overlooking ministry to those outside. Many inner city ministries fail because churches are ignorant of the sociological, economical, and cultural factors involved in doing ministry in the inner city.[17] They fail to understand that inner city residents are the ones most capable of solving inner city problems and should be allowed to participate in roles of leadership within the church and also in making decisions that affect inner city residents.

It seems that success has spoiled the church and widened the gap between the rich and the poor, the secure and the outcast. Instead of preaching the gospel to the poor and providing facilities for them in locations where they feel at home, many Black inner city churches move to safer more respectable neighborhoods, build bigger buildings and attract

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[17]Greenway, 184.

more prosperous worshippers. The poor no longer feel welcome in most of our churches and an urban crisis is at hand.[18]

The inner city has suffered a vacuum in the area of business leadership and financial stability as the upwardly mobile and educated residents move out leaving behind a city void of people financially able to meet the social and economic needs of their community. The central goal of the African American religious community in the inner city should be that of restoring and stabilizing, moral, spiritual, and economic leadership. In order to accomplish this goal, John Perkins proposes the development of indigenous leadership from the community of need. He then recommends a commitment by inner city Christians and their families to live in communities of need, filling the leadership vacuum by modeling healthy life styles.[19] Those who have the education, skills, and live in communities of need have much to contribute because they are aware of the needs within the community and can be sensitive in meeting them. To relocate and live among the poor has become a distinguishing mark of successful Christian community development. Jesus lived and worked among the poor, in fact his mission statement was grounded upon preaching to the poor and delivering them from oppression.[20]

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[18]Michael J. Christensen, City Streets, City People (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 24.

[19]John M. Perkins, The Call to Christian Community Development (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 73.

[20]Luke 4:18-19.

A successful ministry in Jackson, Mississippi, called "Voice of Calvary," was investigated by a reporter who discovered that the secret to their success was in the fact that the entire staff lived in the neighborhood where they ministered. Inner city children need to see and experience families living among them who have strong work ethics, disciplined lifestyles, and Christian values. They need to know that others who have more are not necessarily selfish but are capable of caring and are willing to sacrifice in order to help them.[21] African American inner city children need strong families to mentor them and provide them with a positive image of family life. There is a resurgence of upwardly mobile Black Christians who are willing to move back into the inner city because they are convinced that their presence will have a positive impact in solving inner city problems.

Relocation may not be everyone's calling but every concerned Christian can get involved in mentoring and being a role model for "at risk" inner city children. If children from dysfunctional families were allowed to spend a weekend or even a day in the homes of strong Christian families, observing positive traits of a healthy home life, it would decrease the number of negative incidents in the inner city and enhance the relationship between the haves and the have nots. A strong Christian family would not simply be one that

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[21]Perkins, 76.

goes to church each Sunday but one where the spirit and love of Jesus Christ is revealed in the life of each member through their caring for one another.

There has always been a place in the contemporary church for the so called winners but what about those who are considered the losers of the world? Do the troubled runaways, the traumatized adults with destructive tendencies, the poor and oppressed orphans and pilgrims have a place in our churches? Many considered losers in the eyes of the world and least in the sight of the church are greatest in the kingdom of heaven.[22] According to Jesus, the blessings of God belong to those who are hungry, weep, feel excluded, and are persecuted unjustly.[23]

The Role of the Black Church in Inner City Ministry

Contemporary African American theologians interpret the role of the church to be one where the church acts as an agent for social, political, and economic liberation. The migration of African American families from the farm to the cities after World War I required the church to adjust its mission to inner city families in order to help them deal with low wages, impoverished living conditions and the discrimination of racism.[24]

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[22]Christensen, 26.

[23]Luke 6:20-26.

[24]Thomas G. Poole, "Black Families and the Black Church," in Black Families, eds. Harold E. Cheatham and James B. Stewart (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1990),

The Black middle class drifted away from the inner city and moved to the suburbs which created a vacuum in terms of leadership, values, and resources. As a result of this migration of leadership, the Black church in the inner city also became powerless in terms of being a monitor of norms and values of inner city youth.[25] What was considered acceptable behavior by middle class African American families who once lived in the inner city, has now been replaced by a different set of values. These values are, in essence, the response of Black families, who live in the inner city, to the demands and challenges of their environment. For a girl to have a baby out of wedlock would have been a moral failure and public disgrace in most Black families forty years ago. But now, having a baby without marrying the father, is considered more economically advantageous to many inner city youth who are not able to find jobs that pay above minimum wages. They consider the rewards of public assistance to be greater than the minimum wages and benefits of a married couple.

Inner city Black churches should not compromise in teaching moral values but should be sensitive to the needs of young people who have made mistakes and exercised poor judgement in their actions. Instead of "kicking them out" of

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[25]Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, "Young Black Males in America," in Young, Black, and Male in America, eds. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, et al. (New York: Auburn House, 1988), 18.

church because of their sins, we should be "kicking them in" the loving arms of Christians who are ready to forgive and teach them how to live a Christian life. Many young people are growing up in homes where there is very little or no moral guidance. The urbanized children of the "baby boomers" have all but abandoned a lifestyle of church attendance and family worship. Their children, as a result, are not receiving a religious education and have no idea what a Sunday School is about.

Inner city churches should be encouraged to open up their facilities for classes in order to teach young people the values of marriage and how to be responsible mothers and fathers. Church members should use their skills and volunteer to be tutors, child care workers, youth camp leaders, and counselors. The church must assume the responsibility and take the leadership for job training programs in order to teach our young people the skills necessary for finding and keeping a good job.

There must be more substance abuse education programs in inner city elementary schools. An effective drug prevention approach for young people must include peer counseling, parent involvement, and cooperation among churches, schools, social agencies and the juvenile justice system.[26] Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the role of the Black church has

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[26]Gibbs, "Conclusions and Recommendations," in Young, Black, and Male in America, 337.

shifted from a focus on civil rights to a focus on social services such as head start, child care, youth groups, educational programs, leadership workshops, and credit unions.[27]

The Black church is unique among ethnic communities in the cities across America. In most central cities, the Black church is the greatest in number, the largest in size, the most socially and politically influential and economically solvent institution available. Next to the family, the Black church is the deepest expression of survival in the black community; it is the most indigenous of all institutions in the ghetto and is the only place where family, home, community, and church becomes essentially one.[28]

The Black church, according to James Cone, must proclaim the reality of divine liberation, participate in the struggle for liberation and reveal that the gospel is a reality.[29] The church is that community of persons who got the hint of the gospel and thus refuse to be content with human pain and suffering.[30]

The Theology and Message of the Black Church

After the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, many

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[27]Gibbs, "Conclusions," in Young, Black, and Male, 352.

[28]DuBose, 81.

[29]James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), 130.

[30]Cone, 129.

African American "baby boomers" started leaving the church because of its belief in a theology of "redemptive suffering." We were taught in Black Baptist churches that God allowed suffering and in some cases inflicted pain upon us in order to keep us humble. I can remember a song (author unknown) very popular in Southern churches which stated: "I've learned how to suffer, I've learned how to live right, I've learned how to suffer, for if I suffer, I'll gain eternal life." Not only do the words of this song disagree with the doctrine of salvation by grace but they also support the view that suffering somehow makes us righteous with God. This view does not agree with the biblical teachings that any attempt to become righteous, through our own efforts, is insufficient.[31] The salvation of God is an act that is entirely dependent upon the will of God and not in any human quality.

The idea of Black people suffering for the glory of God has been handed down through generations and is still accepted as being a valid theology in National Baptist churches. To teach children growing up in poverty that they are better off because they are poor, meek, and persecuted gives them a theology of "redemptive suffering." This supports the view that suffering is used by God to prepare Black people for their ultimate freedom and bring about good consequences in

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[31]Rom. 10:1-4.

their lives.[32]   Many young African Americans separated
themselves from the Black church because they could not
identify with a theology of redemptive suffering; it failed to
give them any hope.   This theology was taught to my
grandfather and grandmother who were descendants of slaves.
They, in turn, taught my parents that God allowed and in some
cases inflicted pain and suffering in order to keep us humble,
teach us patience, and prepare us for our heavenly reward. I
did not buy into this "nonsense" and neither will young
African Americans today.

The Black church must be true to the "gospel of
liberation" and "holistic salvation" if it expects to reach
young people in our inner cities. The gospel of liberation is
married to a theology which has an image of God as being good.
The Genesis account of creation states that, "God saw
everything that God made and indeed it was very good."[33] I
cannot associate a God who is good with works that are evil.
I believe God neither participates in evil nor does God allow
evil to happen in order to bring about some good.

Adults who teach inner city children a theology about a
God who allows them to be killed in drive by shootings, denied
adequate food, housing and clothing, and ostracized by society

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[32]Anthony B. Pinn, __Why Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black
Theology__ (New York: Continuum, 1995) 16.

[33]Gen. 1:31.

in order to bring about some good, could not possibly expect them to remain in their churches. Young people in the inner city will not follow a God who stands by, powerless, and watches them suffer. I cannot, neither can a generation of young people, conceive of a God who will stand by, as an impotent observer, and watch someone's child being raped and murdered in order to bring something good out of it.

As humans, we allow suffering and evil to destroy humanity when we stand around watching, as impotent bystanders, and refuse to get involved. We can get involved by voting, being a witness to a crime in our community, identifying the perpetrators or calling 911 to prevent a crime from happening. As a church, we allow suffering and evil when we refuse to use our God given resources of prayer and faith; these resources are capable of controlling the spread of evil.[34] We should stop using God as a scapegoat for the evil which we allow.

Redemptive suffering and liberation theology are diametrically opposed ideas because a God who delivers us from suffering could not possibly be the same God who manipulates moral evil and causes good consequences.[35] Jesus said that his yoke was easy and his burden was light. I interpret this to mean that all who put their trust in Christ as Savior will

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[34]James 1:5-6.

[35]Pinn, 113.

find rest from their heavy labor and burden of suffering.[36]
The church should be a community where pain and suffering are
brought to rest. Jesus promised to give rest to all who came
unto him.[37]

Black churches have traditionally played the role of
comforter; people went there to find strength and
encouragement in an hostile environment. People, broken and
beaten down, could gather together in the church, comfort one
another and be comforted through worship and praise. The
church lives out its call when it is a community of faith with
arms wrapped about a community of pain. Inner city churches
should encourage and enable others to become free of the
earthly powers that destroy their lives. They should warn
those who exploit the poor by proclaiming the sovereign power
and authority of a just God.[38]

Holistic salvation from an African American perspective,
is a revolutionary salvation that includes the spiritual,
physical, social, and economic dimensions of life. The
salvation of God in liberation theology, also means the
deliverance of God from the injustices of racism and
oppression. Liberation theology interprets holistic salvation
to mean that God is participating in all of life's dimensions

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[36]Matt. 11:30.

[37]Matt. 11:28.

[38]James Garbarino, et al., Children in Danger (San
Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992), 46-47.

as a God who fulfills and sustains life. A God who fulfills and sustains life is not consistent with the God of redemptive suffering who allows suffering in order to teach us to be better people.

Young people in our inner cities are tired of suffering and are looking for a way out. If the Black church insists upon teaching them that suffering is God's way to bring about something good, inner city youth will continue to stay away. Inner city youth are looking for power and control over their lives and consider the Black church to be a powerless institution, irrelevant to their needs.

If we, as a National Baptist church, expect to do ministry with inner city youth, we must change our message of redemptive suffering to one of "revolutionary salvation." A revolutionary salvation will enable young people to bring about a change in their environment and allow them the opportunity to be what God has created them to be. It will empower young people in the inner city to participate in the social, political, economical and religious dimensions of their communities.

There are some "para-church" ministries making a conscious effort to reach inner city youth outside the organized church structure. The most successful urban youth ministries are based on para-church models of ministry. These models center around evangelistic outreaches, weekly Bible studies, and building relationships with young people. The

goal is to reach out to the young people where they are to introduce them to Jesus Christ and help them grow into mature Christians. For many inner city children, the para-church is the only Christian community they know.[39] The para-church model is successful because it

1. meets young people on their own turf,
2. builds relationships,
3. offers attractive programming,
4. relies on strong young adult leadership, and
5. has an outside source of funding without the pressure of having to raise money.[40]

The above methods are successful because they put people before programs. National Baptist churches must re-evaluate the methods of doing ministry which emphasize building programs before building people. When we, as a church, reach out and meet the needs of our young people and build trusting relationships with them, they will support our programs.

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[39]Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Youth Ministry in City Churches (Loveland, Colo.: Thom Schultz Publications, 1989), 95.

[40]Roehlkepartain, 96.

CHAPTER 3

The Black Family in the Inner City

Cracks in the Wall

Most young people grow up in an environment where there is at least some security and trust in their families to protect them. This wall of respect and security for adults eventually becomes cracked when young people reach adolescence and observe inconsistencies in the lives of adults. Many inner city children are born into an environment of inconsistency, insecurity, and hypocrisy on the part of adults. They don't have an attitude of trust in their parents and the world around them because they are not protected from the ambiguities of life.[1]

Because of the never-ending problems and challenges facing them each day, inner city children often develop an adult view of the world at an early age. These same children will attend schools and churches where teachers will attempt to relate to them as children and fail. It is a difficult task to teach a child "thou shall not steal" if he/she is hungry each day because mom cashed in the food stamp for drugs. Many such children would not eat if their older siblings were not fast with their hands at the local market. How can one teach discipline to a 10 year old by making him stay after school if he has become a father figure to his

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[1]Stephen D. Jones, Faith Shaping: Youth and the Experience of Faith (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1987), 16.

younger brothers and sisters and is aware of the dangers of leaving them home alone and unprotected.

Many who live outside the inner city simply do not understand the rules of this environment. It is a cruel and unforgiving world where one trusting mistake could cost one his/her life. Many children who live in this world learn to live by the commandment "survival by whatever means necessary." They have difficulty understanding commandments that sound good but do not feed and clothe them. If we are to be effective in teaching inner city children how to live a Christian life, we must do it with our actions, not our doctrines. "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself" must be taught by our actions if we expect to bring about a moral change in the lives of inner city children. Inner city children cannot understand (and neither can I) how a church can protest abortion to save a child, then protest the programs that feed the same child.

Many African American children feel that their parents are unable to protect them, especially in a society where children see evidence of authority resting in the hands of White men and women. They feel unprotected against violence and lawlessness and are likely to grow up regarding their parents as weak figures, controlled by a Euro-dominated society.[2] Black children are forced to live in two cultures,

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[2]James P. Comer and Alvin F. Poussaint, Black Child Care (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 19.

their own minority culture and the majority one of Europeans. They have learned from their parents how to contain their aggression around whites while freely expressing it among Blacks which was considered a necessary survival technique in the Black community for many years.

Black parents must avoid teaching their children the same old kinds of behavior and attitudes needed for survival in earlier periods of White oppression. There is no longer any need for docility; it should be replaced with an attitude of Black pride, self confidence and assertiveness.[3] Parents cannot build confidence in their children if they have none within themselves. This is why the Black church in the inner city is so important as an institution capable of building confidence and self esteem.

The Need for Bonding

Studies indicate that there is a direct association between low self esteem and anti-social behavior. One of the primary factors contributing to the low self esteem in African American inner city youth is the lack of bonding between parent and child. When there is no opportunity for bonding between parent and child, the possibility for the child developing an "attachment disorder" increases.[4] An attachment disorder is a term reserved for individuals who show ababies

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[3]Comer and Poussaint, 21.

[4]John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss, 3 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 1:16.

complete lack of ability to be affectionate with others.

Low self-esteem is classified as an attachment disorder which can result from the lack of bonding between a child and a primary caregiver. Bonding results in the feeling of emotional security in the child who regards the parent or primary caregiver as a secure base from which to venture out and explore his/her surroundings. Studies indicate that securely attached children, bonded to a parent or caregiver, are free to explore their surroundings and learn new skills. Children who are deprived of touch, movement, sound and other sensory input may exhibit neurological disorders that can result in: unusually high or low activity levels; poor organization of behavior; coordination problems; over sensitivity to touch, movement, sight, and sound; poor self control; and a tendency to be under-reactive to sensory stimulation such as pain.[5] Every day in America 1,000 unwed teenage girls become mothers. Seventy-four percent of the babies born in inner city neighborhoods are born out of wedlock and grow up pin homes with no father figure. Many of these children have no responsible caregiver in the home who are capable of providing a loving, intimate relationship necessary for the child to bond with an adult and develop a positive, secure attitude about life.

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[5]Carol Janson, The Long Term Effects of Institutionalization on the Behavior of Children from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union (Meadows Lands, Pa.: Parent Network for Post Institutionalized Care, 1995), 8.

wedlock and grow up in homes with no father figure. Many of these children have no responsible care-givers in the home who are capable of providing a loving, intimate relationship necessary for the child to bond with an adult and develop a positive, secure attitude about life.

The Absent Father

Fathers who are absent from the home and the lives of their children leave permanent psychological and emotional scars. The void left in a child's life, especially a son, by an absentee father can create peer dependency, lack of self control, lack of trust, and rebellion against male authority figures. The unique role of a father in the life of a son is one that has a lasting effect on the psychological and emotional well being of the child. There is a direct association between absent African American fathers and the element of delinquency, under-achievement, and anti-social behavior in African American males. African American males living in father absent homes are likely to suffer shame and lower levels of self esteem than those living in father present homes.[6]

Many experts agree that the lack of self esteem is a common thread running through the problems of Black crime, inability to find jobs, and school drop out problems. In order to develop self esteem and a fundamental sense of

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[6]Richard C. Durfield, "A Model for Mentoring and Surrogate Fathering for African American Males" (Ph.D diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995), 4.

security, children need constant and loving care from both father and mother. In reference to African Americans, self-esteem is a common prescription for the young who bear the particular burden of a heritage of racial prejudice and neglect.[7]

The Bible confirms the importance of children having a relationship with a father in order to build self esteem and provide children with a sense of security. King Solomon wrote that "children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers."[8] Glory is defined as something that secures praise, brings honor, and provides a good reputation. A child's glory is an invisible tapestry or covering that surrounds the child, protects and gives the child a sense of security. Fathers who can supply this glory offer children their most brilliant asset.[9]

The presence of a father in the home not only provides a sense of completeness and security but is also instrumental in establishing discipline and encouraging achievement in younger children. A member of my church had a problem with her son fighting other children in school and rebelling against the teacher's authority. She could not understand why her child was labeled with having a behavior disorder when he was the

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[7]Durfield, 14.

[8]Prov. 17:6.

[9]Yolanda White Powell, "Fathers, You Got The Power," Urban Family, Winter 1994, 22.

perfect child at home. After counseling her, I discovered that her son's behavior started almost immediately following the separation from the child's father who moved to another city. A decision which allowed the child to live with his father during the nine months of school was reached and there was a noticeable improvement in behavior.

Black inner city churches must encourage absent and uninvolved fathers to change their status, realize their potential, and activate their influence in raising and training their children. Single mothers are struggling to provide their children with a good education but they cannot do the job alone. Fathers must "take up the slack" by stepping in and speaking up on behalf of their sons and daughters. Fathers who attend P.T.A. meetings, volunteer in the classroom once a month, go on field trips, write notes of concern to teachers, and make calls to check on the progress of their children offer them much needed support and are able to model for them a lifestyle of being accountable for their actions.

African American children in the inner city must learn strategies to deal with racism and negative feelings about being black. They must be able to overcome a lack of self-esteem and develop a positive attitude about life and a positive Black identity if they expect to survive the harsh realities of the inner city. Boys growing up in fatherless homes often turn to older boys for advise and information

which they would ordinarily receive from their fathers; this advise is not often good and is responsible for leading many young men into a life of delinquency. Because of the attention and sense of belonging they receive from other boys, young African American males are susceptible to do what the group does whether right or wrong.

The Need for Positive Role Models

Richard Durfield argues that "mentoring" and "surrogate fathering," are the best solutions to the growing problem of absentee fathers in Black families. Surrogate parenting can be traced, historically, to "consanguineal ken groupings" among African American slaves. Today, these extended family groupings constitute nearly eight percent of the 10.5 million black households.[10] The fact that many black households are centered around extended family groupings should not be considered a sign of weakness but a sign of strength. Through surrogate fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, Black families have maintained a strong identity and considerable stability from slavery until the present. A surrogate parent can make a significant contribution to the development of a child's self esteem, personal identity, and address issues of sexual identity and responsibility. The mentor or surrogate parent can help young people negotiate a successful transition into adulthood. By being a role model and giving helpful advise, the mentor is instrumental in preparing young adults

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[10]Durfield, 15.

to face the world with confidence.

Young African American males need "father figures" to help them make a successful transition into manhood. A father figure can assist in the "rite of passage" for a young man and guide him in making a successful transition into manhood. A rite of passage is a ceremony or event which signifies a "new status" within a particular group and marks a time of passage from one social position to another.[11] A negative method of participating in rites of passage into adult life can be seen in young men who join gangs and commit to a life of crime. This type of pathological behavior can be averted if positive attention is given to young men by loving fathers or adult males acting as surrogate fathers.

African American families are primarily matriarchal in terms of the devotion of the children to their mothers. During slavery it was typical of Black mothers to be the ones responsible to hold together what was left of the family. African American women grew to be very protective of their children, especially the boys; this was probably due to an overwhelming fear of losing yet another male to the slave auctioneer. Even today, Black males have a special bond with their mothers that makes it often difficult to break in terms of leaving home and starting a family of their own. African American fathers, who are responsible and who teach their sons how to be men, should be recognized as "invaluable resources

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[11]Durfield, 26.

in our churches." Although there is a special devotion to mother, African American boys tend to look to their fathers or some other male figure as a role model at an early age. The bible supports the idea of fathers being mentors to their sons and exhortations are given for father's to teach them the "Word of God."[12] Black churches must recognize the need for young Black men to identify with positive role models and to develop a sense of self worth.

The breakdown of the family has left young people without any support system of caring adults who are capable of being leaders and role models to teach them how to be responsible men and women. Responsible mothers and fathers are replaced by neighborhood criminals who teach young people how to make money and get a thrill out of life without having any concern for who gets hurt in the process.

Black inner city churches must assume the role of mentoring to young people and becoming responsible role models. Many churches have the gifted personnel capable of teaching inner city children how to make money, hold down a job, and be a responsible parent but we sometimes get caught up with our traditional methods of evangelism and religious education which do not meet the needs of inner city children.

Inner city Black churches have traditionally participated in social programs which dealt with short range solutions such as getting people temporary jobs and on public relief, but

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[12]Prov. 6:20, 23:22.

never any long range solutions to bring about social change.[13] The church tried to heal the cancer of hopelessness in the inner city by using the "band-aid of religion." Church programs and bible studies do not set people free from drugs nor do they fill their empty wallets.

Inner city youth are in need of deliverance from the bondages of sin and are hungry for a demonstration of God's power in their everyday lives. The Christian church is considered irrelevant by inner city youth because it is viewed as being a "behind the walls," "pulpit powered," "whimpy" kind of organization that talks well but is afraid to get involved. "They're afraid to address young people because they're afraid they might be assaulted. If I'm around an older Black person for a while, they'll say, you really can think! You have a family? Like I'm from another planet or something. You can condemn kids from the pulpit, but a criminal will tell them they got some style, tell them how to make money. Is a preacher going to do that, or a doctor? No."[14] These very chilling words taken from an interview with a Kansas City teenager give us clear evidence of the huge gap in understanding between young people and adults in the inner city.

Young people who didn't have parents that cared believe

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[13]Sterling Plumpp, Black Rituals (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972), 35.

[14]John Leland and Allison Samuels, "The New Generation Gap," Newsweek, 17 Mar. 1997, 56.

all adults are the same. Inner city youth have grown accustomed to being used and learn how to manipulate others from having been manipulated themselves. They are used by public education, which is more interested in filling empty seats than empty heads, by churches who build programs to draw children hoping the parents will follow with their wallets, and even by parents who understand that an extra mouth to feed means an extra dollar in their AFDC check. There is little wonder these children grow up insecure, nontrusting, and suspicious of adults and institutions in society. Inner city churches must gain the trust of its young through efforts that demonstrate love in action. We must come from behind the walls of the sanctuary and take to the streets the message of love and demonstrate the power of God through giving. Some inner city youth leave the Christian church and join the Muslim religion because they see in the Islamic faith a willingness to take to the streets and get involved in the lives of the people. It is not uncommon to see young Muslims patrolling the drug infested ghettos with phones and literature in an effort to discourage drug dealers and educate the masses against the evils of a corrupt system of greed.

Baptist churches that continue to uphold a belief that the field for serving the Lord is within the organization must be willing to take to the streets and reclaim their neighborhoods from criminal activity in order to gain respect from inner city youth. Louis Farrakhan has been embraced by

the "hip-hop culture" because they perceive him to be a leader who is not afraid to get involved. An interview by Leland and Samuels revealed the following:

> I love Farrakhan without question or reservation, he's a strong, stand-up black man. He never turned on us on the street. He's for turning us into men.[15]

National Baptist churches run the risk of losing its young to other religious groups that demonstrate their faith by living and working among the people in order to improve their lot and relieve their suffering.

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[15]Leland and Samuels, 57.

CHAPTER 4

Transforming Culture

Black Youth Cultures in the Inner City

The creation of a global Black culture is the product of White images of Black people which are distributed through the music, fashion, and television industries. A global Black culture is also the product of the action of Black people themselves. The first international "agora" for English speaking Black artists and intellectuals existed in New York in the 1920s during the Harlem Renaissance.[1] Migration of Blacks from the rural south to the northern cities created an environment where crowded living conditions and unemployment were conducive to a "hustle to make it" type of lifestyle for many Blacks. The choices were limited as some parents worked two and three jobs in order to make ends meet while others engaged in the lifestyle of hustling which often led to destructive behavior patterns. Mass migration, mass media, the creation of large Black communities, rapid means of communication, and the music industry have all been instrumental in the globalization of Black culture.

Black culture consists of the creative forms of expression as one reflects on history, endures pain, and experiences joy. It is the Black community expressing itself through music, poetry, prose and other art forms. Black

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[1]Livio Sansone, "The Making of a Black Culture," in Youth Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, eds. Vered Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff (New York: Routledge, 1995), 133.

theology must take seriously the cultural expressions of the community it represents so that it will be able to speak relevantly to the black condition.[2] National Baptist churches must realize that the environment of the inner city has produced a type of "sub-culture" which the young people have adopted as their own. The Black church in the inner city must be sensitive and aware of the unique sub-cultures of inner city youth and must be willing to use methods of ministry that relate to their environment.

There is a need for new symbols for expressing ones faith in God if ministry with inner city youth is to be relevant to their culture. "The Lord is my Shepherd" is a beautiful symbol if you live on a farm. Inner city children simply cannot relate to the agricultural type of symbolic expression used in Baptist churches to convey one's faith in God. The church is in need of new symbols which invoke meaning to those with whom we minister, not that which we inherited from our past.[3] The inculturation of the Christian faith in the inner city cannot be accomplished if we continue to use European influenced religious ideas and traditions.

Jean-Marc Ela, who offers us a critical reflection of the practice of Christianity in Africa, is faced with a similar challenge. He believes that the inculturation of the Christian

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[2]Cone, 27.

[3]Letty M. Russell, Church in the Round (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 197.

faith in Africa cannot make use of outmoded (Westernized) cultural forms. He suggests that the best way to evangelize Black Africa is by establishing a relationship with the living revelation in the person of an apostle from the base community. He feels that God can speak best to an African in a style that is familiar to Africans.[4] Ela has given us an excellent analysis of the reality of Africa's struggle to express a Christian faith through the use of signs and symbols alien to its culture.

National Baptist churches are also caught in a struggle to reconcile traditional Christian beliefs and practices with a culture indigenous to African Americans. An entire generation of inner city youth have escaped the outreach efforts of many of our churches because of a failure to identify with a religious culture the church refuses to change. Those who minister to diverse ethnic groups in our cities must ask themselves, how much are we willing to change in order to identify with the beliefs and customs of others in our community.

The failure of man to communicate with man is evident in our society and the need for a common language is desperate. The church is also affected by this problem and seem willing to disrupt traditional language in favor of the immediate and the dramatic which was evident in the use of the "thees and

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[4]Jean-Marc Ela, My Faith as an African, trans. John Pairman and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 45.

thous" of the King James version and prayer book liturgies. The church has too often concentrated on the problems of its own language while ignoring the more basic problem of providing a common language for the true community.

Some feel that the language of worship is a language of poetry and should reflect the language of the street and everyday life. The Christian language is a face to face speech where one believer encourages another and commonly held events are retold and celebrated. In view of this description, Christian language takes on the form of poetry, presenting life's experiences in the form of great pictures of God among us.[5] The language of the church in the inner city should reflect the life experiences of inner city residents. Their struggles, disappointments, tragedies, hopes, and dreams should all be a part of the worship experience but the message from the pulpit should leave them encouraged that there can be a better life for them in this world of evil.

Sub-cultures

Sub-cultures, sometimes referred to as "counter cultures," are collections of persons who interrelate through shared experiences and activities. There are many youth sub-cultures among young people with each contrasting with the others. It is a mistake to generalize about all sub-cultures because they are all unique. Some young people belong to a

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[5]Henry E. Horn, Worship in Crisis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 26-27.

cooperative culture which consists of such groups as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and YMCA. Cooperative cultures generally adopt the dominate cultural views of society and young people who belong cooperate with adults and see themselves as future adults.

Inner city youth tend to adhere to a type of "counter-culture" which has predominantly antagonistic views of life and is basically uncooperative with older adults. It is difficult, if not impossible, to involve inner city youth in church activities if they feel they don't fit in or have negative attitudes about themselves as well as the church.[6] They have no desire to conform to any "status quo" nor will they accept the traditional norms and values of society. This group of young people are more prone to set up alternative lifestyles and may digress into a state of rebellion or become trouble makers who reject the world system and everything it stands for. This rebellion is often acted out against their own age group through acts of violence and gang warfare.

Christians who pay attention to inner city youth will discover they have evolved a sub-culture of protest and resistance on the streets. Inner city churches should spend time listening to rap or salsa music, reading the writing on tenement walls in the ghettos and barrios, and interpreting the murals on the sides of public buildings; all of these

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[6]Merton P. Strommen, Bridging the Gap (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), 33.

forms of cultural expression and discourse manifest a critique of society that identifies and questions systems of structured oppression.[7]

The church must take notice of the cultural expressions of inner city youth and implement ways to incorporate these expressions into the life of the church. Young people want to be respected for who they are and what they believe. The church can show respect for inner city youth by inviting them to participate in the life of the church and asking them, "What can you do for us?" instead of telling them, "This is what we can do for you." Young people have become apathetic towards the church and institutions of society that will not consider them a voice to be heard. They are leaving religious organizations that will not allow them the opportunity to express their faith in ways generic to their culture.

This society idolizes expertise and devalues common experiential wisdom or "mother wit." Such a devaluing of experience as usable knowledge creates a deep despair and sense of powerlessness among the inner city poor who have much to contribute, in the way of skills and "street knowledge, to the effort of solving urban problems.[8]

Nsega Warfield-Coppock is among a developing group of

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[7]Hal Joseph Recinos, "Racism and Drugs in the City: The Church's Call to Ministry," in Youth Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, eds. Vered Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff (London: Routledge, 1995), 103.

[8]Letty M. Russell, Christian Education in Mission (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1967), 194.

Afrocentric philosophers who believe that educational and social services to African American youth should reflect the ideals and cultural practices of African Americans. She believes the promotion of a natural resiliency to pathological behavior is the most effective prevention technique to use in working with African American youth. She is also in favor of using rituals and African traditions to identify and celebrate the natural attributes of young African Americans. One such recommended ritual is the "Rite of Passage" for teenagers that prepares them for entrance into the adult world. This ritual would celebrate and identify various stages of their development from birth, puberty, marriage, eldership, and death.[9]

Most worship services and educational programs for children in National Baptist churches are designed by adults to meet the needs and expectations of adults. The expectations placed upon children by adults are centered around the need of having them conform to an adult image of Christian life and behavior. I consider Letty Russell's feminist interpretation of church to be a useful model that could possibly transform ministry with inner city children. Her idea of a "Church in the Round" describes a community of faith working to anticipate God's "New Creation" by becoming partners with those who are at the margins of church and

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[9]Nsega Warfield-Coppock, "Approaches to Resiliency: An African-Centered Perspective," in The Ongoing Journey, ed. Boys Town Press (Boys Town, Neb.: Boys Town Press, 1995), 110.

society.[10] People gathered around the table and welcomed as equal partners in God's house, working in solidarity for justice and freedom for all of God's people, is a very appealing image. The inner city could use such an image because the young people who live there are often marginalized and alienated from participating in the good of society as well as the church. They could benefit from a "round table" of hospitality in a church that welcomes and allows them to be themselves.

Inner city youth have much to contribute to the life of the church in terms of art, music, and creative expressions that are unique to their culture. Every major movement in the world was, in some way, either lead or inspired by young people. It was the young people who joined forces with Joshua and Caleb in conquering the promised land while the older generation perished in the wilderness.[11] From the Protestant Reformation to the Civil Rights Movement, young people have provided the empathy, energy, and motivation needed for radical change. The church should recognize this fact and do everything possible to include inner city youth in its program of ministry.[12] They need an open, friendly environment that is willing to appreciate the gifts they have to offer God and

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[10]Russell, Church in the Round, 12.

[11]Num. 14:31-32.

[12]Donald C. Posterski, Friendship: A Window on Ministry to Youth (Scarborough, Ont.: Project Teen Canada, 1985), 11.

humanity.

The "Inner City Round-table of Youth" (ICRY) program is a Chicago based ministry that is made up of Black and Hispanic males and females ages 12-25 from designated poverty areas. Eighty percent of the youth are categorized as members of street gangs and other sub-culture groups whose leaders sit on the ICRY round-table board as directors. Members who attend the ICRY program are considered "program resistent youth" who do not wish to belong to any program because they feel the programs are ineffective, frustrating, and unsuccessful in meeting their needs. When a youth comes into the program, he/she is not immediately thrown into an institutionalized situation (i.e., they are not sent to a psychiatrist). The youth come in and select the type of counseling method they feel is best for them.[13]

Religious educators and adults, unaware of life in the inner city, have no idea that the children who live there are not on the same mental and emotional level with other children their age. They are as wise as adults in terms of survival, but in understanding the reason behind their suffering, they remain as children. As a substitute teacher in Kansas City, I can recall frequent misunderstandings between teachers, who lived outside the inner city, and inner city children. Some

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[13]Nizam Fatah, "Inner City Round-table of Youth," in Youth, Crime, and Urban Policy, ed. Robert L. Woodson (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981).

teachers would try to gain control of a wayward student by using methods familiar to their own culture and tradition, but it simply did not work. A fourth grade teacher could not understand why her student would rather be expelled from school than stand in a corner as punishment for fighting. She did not know that the child was too tired to stand and also preferred being sent home to be with his mother who was strung out on drugs and not capable of caring for his younger siblings. It is unrealistic to expect a child to be on time for classes, sit still upon demand, be alert, finish all assignments, and respond positively to a learning environment when the child stays up all night because of confusion in and around the home.

Some Black children in the inner city never experience eating a nutritious breakfast in the morning and return home each day from school with fear that mom or dad is in jail or dead. There is also the constant threat of violence in and around the home that increases the anxiety in these children who are often victims of abuse. A child should be kept safe, sheltered, and nurtured so that he/she can grow and develop. Community and domestic violence puts young children in jeopardy and threatens the very core of what they need to be successful in life.

In Western culture, childhood is regarded as a period of special protection and rights. But children who live in communities characterized by day-to-day violence and danger

miss the opportunity of having their basic needs met and will often grow up to be insecure, hostile, fearful, and lack self-esteem.[14] We cannot treat these children as children and expect them to respond to us in a positive way. Inner city children need love and understanding from adults who are more interested in being a friend than in being a disciplinarian. I agree with the insight of Margaret Mead who states that professionals must go out and listen to the kids talk so they can find out what they are talking about and not use nice little formula which will explain everything. If teachers cannot learn from the students, they cannot teach.[15]

The church is patterned after most educational systems in America which assumes the older and more senior you are, the more you know and the more right you have to determine the attitudes and values of other people. This attitude alienates young people who wish to have individuality; they do not wish to fit into our molds of tradition.[16]

Jesus spoke against the traditions of the Pharisees and religious leaders of his time as being the primary reason his Word had become ineffective in their churches.[17] The bible speaks of David who, as a young lad preparing to fight a

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[14] Garbarino, 1.

[15] Maxwell Jones, "Youth and Community," in Youth: Problems and Approaches, ed. S.J. Shamsie (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1972), 242.

[16] Maxwell Jones, 293.

[17] Mark 7:13.

giant, refused the traditional weapons of King Saul and chose to use his own weapons because they were familiar to his culture and past experiences.[18] Inner city youth reject the traditions of the Baptist and other mainline denominational churches. They consider these traditions irrelevant and meaningless weapons in fighting the giants of drugs, poverty, and delinquency.

Young people are looking for a new value system because they cannot find evidence in past history and tradition to guide their behavior today. Youth today do not want to follow the adult style as they consider it inappropriate to the modern world; they have no models so they are experimenting and setting up their own style.[19]

Early observations in this society indicate that young people tend to drop out of established traditions and values and turn to strange and sometimes threatening sources of enlightenment. They often feel alienated from the values of their parents, family and work styles of earlier generations. Society has primarily considered these sub-cultural groups of young people as a disturbing, sometimes amusing counter culture group that can be safely tolerated and even absorbed by the prevailing culture. Many see them as belonging to a youthful culture that offers no serious threat to the

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[18]1 Sam. 17:38-39.

[19]Maxwell Jones, 213.

established political, or economic power.[20] In fact, today's opportunistic barons of Wall Street have learned to tap the youth culture and transform it into a multi-billion dollar industry. Hollywood, MTV, BET, the fashion, music, and sports industries have all cashed in on the counter cultural life styles of urban youth.

Many African American males leave the church because they consider the religious doctrines irrelevant to their culture. I have often stated that there is no gang problem but there is a "father love your son problem." I believe that "rites of passage" and other rituals which dignify manhood and contribute to the bonding between fathers and sons, can be useful in helping to eliminate a desire in our young men to join gangs. There is a need for liturgy in our churches which encourages young people to commit their lives in service to God as instruments of love instead of hate, sharing instead of selfishness, and giving instead of greed.

I agree with Coppock's belief in using ritual that not only reflects the culture of the indigenous group, but also celebrates their natural attributes and promotes resiliency to their pathological lifestyles. The educational and social services to African American youth should reflect their cultural practices.[21]

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[20]Robert L. Johnson, <u>Counter Culture and the Vision of God</u> (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), 20-26.

[21]Warfield-Coppock, 114.

Have we, as a Black church, been inconsistent in our ministry to young Black males? Are the methods we use in ministering to young people compatible with a sub-culture which appears to be in opposition to our religious traditions? We must be willing to address these questions if we, as a National Baptist Convention, expect to minister to our young male population. Our liturgy and rituals must be events that are sensitive to the needs of African American males who are entering puberty. These events are able to teach them the responsibilities of manhood and commit them to a lifestyle of Christian service.

The author Stephen Jones was able to engage the youth of his church in a culture exchange program. The children in his church made frequent visits to other churches and youth missions in order to recognize the spirit of Christ at work in other communities. This approach taught the children the "mutuality of missions" and was also able to break down barriers of cultural and racial differences.[22] In our "Super Saturday" program at the ReHope Youth Center, we were able to transport 153 inner city children to one of the suburban White congregations for a musical and magic show. The host congregation had each child bring a brown bag lunch to share with each of our inner city children. The results were so dramatic that not a single adult was able to hold back the tears as we witnessed mutual love and acceptance between

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[22]Stephen D. Jones, 92.

children who, although different in many ways, were able to bond around a common need for love and acceptance. Inner city children will respond to doctrines of God's love when they see it living in God's people; actions speak louder than doctrines.

Young people share a growing disillusionment with institutions because of negative experiences with school, church, and family. Many inner city youth have chosen not to participate in institutional life and have formed their own sub-culture of friends.[23] Inner city gangs are made up of young people who have rejected "institutionalized programming" they consider to be irrelevant in meeting their needs and in preparing them to survive the mean streets of the city. The gang becomes their family, school, and church; it teaches them survival techniques that are adaptable to the streets and offers them material gain and social status without the traditional 8 to 5 job.

Young people living in inner city poverty are surrounded by elements of hopelessness and despair. Many fear they will never participate in the fullness of life and enjoy the blessings of a good paying job, starting a family, owning a house, or taking a vacation. The "American Dream" to some children has turned into a "Nightmare in the Inner City."

Economic problems of the inner city are due in part to the exodus of stable jobs from urban centers to cheaper labor

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[23]Posterski, 85.

markets abroad. The urban migration of poor ethnic groups, white fear of Black crime and the erosion of the tax base have all contributed to the unemployment, hunger, and homelessness of millions in our major cities.

According to Cornel West, the liberal notion that more government programs can solve social problems is too simplistic because it focuses on the economic dimension only. The conservative idea of changing the moral behavior of the urban dweller highlights the immoral actions of urbanites but ignores the responsibilities of the public for the immoral circumstances that haunt them.[24] West feels there is a serious shortage of quality leadership in the Black community which results from the distance African American leaders have taken from the traditions of resistance, community bonding, and a credible sense of political struggle. He believes the only remedy for the leadership crisis in Black America is to engage in strategic thinking about how to create new models of leadership. What is needed is the kind of leader who transcends race and puts forward a vision for social change for all who suffer from socially induced misery.[25]

If we, as a church, are to ever understand the dynamics of sub-cultures in the inner city, we must come to grips with the life experiences of young people who live in environments

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[24]Cornel West, Race Matters (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4.

[25]West, 69.

which produce despair and hopelessness.

> Out of the traumas of Chicago, Dallas, Memphis and Los
> Angeles, they have raised their cry, a cry addressed to
> a people supposedly representing Judeo-Christian
> civilization. But did we hear their cry? Can the mass
> media or the corporate state hear such a cry? Do we not
> receive their anguish as an expression of nihilism rather
> than a passionate outcry for justice and compassion?[26]

The Black church must be able to confess cultural bankruptcy and admit its inability to understand a generation of inner city youth. We, as a church, must welcome those who explore new sources of human understanding and structures for justice; we must resist throwing up cultural blinders. Inner city churches should know that all cultures experience morphological shifts and remember that times of cultural transformation are times of religious creativity. The integrity of the Christian message is not necessarily jeopardized by cultural transformation. If we experience signs of sub-culture in our midst which appears to represent a rejection of Western Christianity or a substitute for the church, we would do well to restrain ourselves from premature judgement. The encounter should lead us to reflect upon our own history and the points at which the promise of the counter culture and the promise of the Christian gospel meet.[27]

As a church, we should not be surprised or puzzled, by a generation of young people who are turning to religious styles that cut across the grain of "post-war Protestant theology."

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[26]Johnson, 33.

[27]Johnson, 42.

Have we forgotten the dynamic of the underground church? Have we missed the point behind the Monastic orders and the renewal that came out of their counter-cultural movement of the Middle Ages. The Moravian brethren, the Quakers, the Shakers, and the Mennonites were all counter cultural religious movements that gave impetus to the missionary activity of the entire Protestant tradition. They lived out of the transcendent power of the kingdom of God beyond the fears and inhibitions of cultural exclusion. The gospel of Christ is viewed by many counter cultures as a message the church cannot embrace without separating itself from material ideologies and cultural binds.[28]

Ethnocentrism

The religious traditions of mainline Protestant churches have failed to meet the needs of urban youth in terms of helping them survive the asphalt jungles of the city. The concept of Black culture is closely related to Black experience and Black history. We could say that Black experience is what Blacks feel when they try to carve out an existence in a dehumanized White society; it is Black Soul, the pain and joy of reacting to Whiteness and affirming Blackness.[29] National Baptist churches should do everything possible to insure that inner city children receive a "multi-cultural" education which is important for their psychological

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[28]Johnson, 125.

[29]Cone, 27.

and social well being. A multi-cultural education should help inner city youth feel good about themselves, their culture, and their heritage. A child's education should not, in any way directly or indirectly, make him/her feel inferior.[30] Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is right and everyone else's is wrong. The belief that European civilization was superior had an adverse effect on the missionary work throughout the world as missionaries attempted to obliterate the native homogenous units of mankind. The same spirit that wanted Gentiles to become Jews, Berbers to become Romans, and Copts to become Greeks now works to encourage American Indians, Asians, and African Americans to become Europeans.[31]

The idea of unity in the church is often a disguised attempt to break down homogenous units and deny certain ethnic groups the right to worship and serve God in ways that are familiar to their culture. Unity, according to European culture, has traditionally meant "uniformity" where the culture of certain homogenous groups is assimilated into European culture before it is accepted or viewed as being correct. I find it amazing even today in this society that one culture's use of the English language is considered correct and superior over another simply because it is the

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[30]Johnson, 256.

[31]Timothy M. Monsma, "Family Clan, and Tribe in the City," in Discipling the City, ed. Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 165.

language most commonly used.

The Black Church is in need of an awakening to shed its Euro-dominated desires, values, and attitudes. Garth Baker-Fletcher refers to this awakening as an "Xodus Calling" or prophetic summons to leave the sinful space of Euro-domination and "wake up." There is a prevailing mood of Africentrism which many of our young people adhere to. Africentrism is a resurgence of Black consciousness which places African Americans in the center of things as movers, shakers, and shapers of their own destinies. It places them as subjects of history and culture and not just objects of European history.[32]

Instead of adopting programs that are a product of European theology, Black churches in the inner city must design programs that adhere to the Black theology of liberation. Black theology was born in rebellion against European theology because European theology would not accommodate the liberation of Black people. Black and White churches in America today have failed to answer the call of God for justice for the poor and the oppressed. The Black church must be willing to reach out to the poor in our inner cities and take the leadership in bringing the healing power of God to the inner city.[33]

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[32]Garth Baker-Fletcher, Xodus: An African American Male Journey (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 6.

[33]Garbarino, 40-41.

Hip-Hop Culture

One counter-cultural expression that has become a standard way of life in the inner city is called "hip-hop." Hip-Hop is a culture that defines music, the way you dress, walk, talk, and face the world. The generation of young African Americans who identify with the hip hop culture refuse to assimilate into or adopt the mainstream European culture in this country. In an interview with a teenager named Craig, the following information was revealed: "My parents feel like to be somebody you had to be like the White people, and that's not real. My generation is standing up for ours."[34]

The need to be real and keep it real is a major theme of the hip-hop generation which expresses an autonomous desire and search for the true meaning of blackness. There is a need for this generation (and I believe for every generation) to identify with a culture they can call their own, one that builds up their self esteem and fills in the gaps of insecurity. To feel that we are important, worthwhile and needed is part of our nature as human beings. African American inner city youth have been labeled by society as being losers, criminals, drug pushers, gang bangers, and misfits who are a threat to the American way of life. This type of stereotyping on of inner city youth contributes to the overall destruction of their self esteem and increases the feeling of hopelessness.

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[34]Leland and Samuels, 54.

The Black church is in a struggle to become relevant to inner city youth. "We have failed our children; we misread our victories and mistook class-specific successes which were not transferable to the poor, and now the poor are paying us back with a vengeance."[35]

Rap Music

Rap music is an art form born out of the hip hop culture and is merchandised by the music industry for huge profits. It has become the preeminent street form of counter-cultural art and discourse for African American youth. Rap is classified as "ghettocentric" which is interpreted as being conscious of the hard core ways, evils, temptations, pleasures, and beauty of the streets.[36]

Much controversy exists in African American communities over the lyrics of rap music which are often filled with anger, obscenities, sexual perversions, and violence. Rap should be placed in the same category with blues because both give a personal account of one's existence in an hostile world. Rap music is filled with a certain amount of rebelliousness and uncompromising insight which are both elements of what Anthony Pinn calls "Nitty Gritty Hermeneutics." A "Nitty Gritty" hermeneutic is free from all restrictions and makes a clear unromanticized understanding of a hostile world; it forces a confrontation with the "funky

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[35]Leland and Samuels, 55.

[36]Baker-Fletcher, 131.

stuff of life" and finds strength in the challenge posed.[37]

According to Baker-Fletcher, rap's anger points an accusing finger at all values that replace or displace the values of the streets. He feels that the church can learn something from rap if we are open to the possibility that rap may provide insights, clues, direct and indirect access into areas of black culture that are inaccessible to most Christians. Rappers and Black churches should come into conversation with one another because African American youth are listening to both voices. "We must learn from one another, be challenged, defend, argue, and be willing to change when evidence suggests that former ways may not forward the liberation, salvation, uplift and healing of Africans."[38]

National Baptist churches will fall into the trap of ethnocentrism if they refuse to allow inner city youth to worship God and live a Christian lifestyle free from religious traditions. These traditions inhibit inner city youth from conforming to the image of Christ. As a church, we must acknowledge our wrongs in our attempt to take away the language and culture of the inner city and replace it with religious language and practices considered correct by European standards.

The new move of the spirit, which is allowing many young Christians to dance their native dance in the worship service,

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[37] Pinn, 116.

[38] Baker-Fletcher, 134.

cannot be practiced in Tongan and certain Samoan churches. Native dancing is not allowed on Sundays because of a century old missionary tradition. There are some Baptist churches that frown upon those who clap their hands too loud or shout and dance in a worship celebration. To deny inner city youth the freedom to worship God in a style and with a musical form that represents their life experiences and cultural background is to deny the very roots and foundation of contemporary gospel music.

Since the days of Thomas A. Dorsey, who is considered the father of contemporary gospel, until the present, the lyrics and music of gospel musicians have basically consisted of commentaries on personal religious experiences in a society that is most often hostile. Dorsey was a pioneer in fusing instrumental accompaniments clearly associated with forms created outside the church.[39] These forms of musical expression are generic to an urban culture and lifestyle and have influenced the worship in not only the Black Church but all churches which consider their foot stomping, hand clapping, style of praise to be Gospel.

Young people in the inner city will find worship more meaningful when they can identify with the sounds from their own context and environment. The work of God's people in worship should never be limited to ritual action that is not

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[39]Melva Wilson Costen, _African American Christian Worship_ (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 102.

contextualized.[40] The context of the inner city and gospel music have formed a "happy marriage" in the "hip-hop" style of musical expression cherished by inner city youth. This new "hip-hop gospel" has found a home on performance stages and in videos, nightclubs, and record stores around the world. Some of its leading advocates such as Kirk Franklin, Take Six, Sounds of Blackness, Commissioned, and others are enjoying a crossover appeal to young people in the church as well as in the world. Some church leaders have considered this type of music too secular and will not incorporate it into the worship service.

From Thomas Dorsey to Kirk Franklin, young people have been criticized and condemned for enjoying a type of music that they can relate to. We must be careful, in our Baptist churches, not to criticize and judge young people for adopting a music that makes them want to sing, clap their hands and in the words of Kirk Franklin, sometimes it just "makes me want to stomp."[41] Hip-Hop gospel celebrates one's personal experience with Jesus Christ as a victory over all the forces of evil and destruction in our cities. Young people have a "now that the pain has ended, let's party" attitude after giving their lives to Christ. When they go to church they want to do what they have learned to do best and that is to

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[40]Costen, 104.

[41]Kirk Franklin, "Stomp," God's Property, B-Rite Music, 1997.

"party."

Worship services in Black churches must be experiences of celebration if we expect inner city youth to participate and enjoy. Religious traditions that quench the spirit and teach Christians to frown upon those who will make a joyful noise unto the Lord, will drive young people away from our churches. Acts chapter two should be a charter for those who wish to retain their own language and style of worship. The gift of tongues was not given to the church in order for Christians to speak ecstatically or for self edification but each individual was able to hear the Word and worship God in his/her own language.[42]

Unity has never meant the doing away of one's culture. Jesus prayed for unity but also prayed that the church not be taken out of the world.[43] The world is made up of many diverse languages and cultures and if Christians are to minister to the world, they must stay in the world and learn how to use the language and culture of the world to communicate the gospel message. Another model of cultural diversity is found in Ephesians 4:15-16, when Paul describes the church as being the body of Christ made up of many members, all different in their gifts and contributions but working together in a common faith.

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[42]Acts 2:8,11.

[43]John 17:15.

CHAPTER 5

Transforming Religious Education

Traditional Methods

My generation was brought up by parents who believed that children were to be owned as property with little or no individual rights. Parents, particularly fathers, had full authority to shape and control the values and behavior of their children. This attitude often led to the abuse of power because adults assumed they had power over the children they possessed. Some adults interpret the inability of children to protect themselves as a sign of vulnerability, weakness and defenselessness. Many adults would rather ignore and forget their own childhood because it reminds them of a subordinate and vulnerable period of their lives.

Children have yet to be regarded as fully human because many adults tend to pass on beliefs and practices inherited from their parents who believed that children were private property. This idea not only influenced society but also the church which used biblical stories to support this hierarchical view. Fathers who traded their daughters in elaborate marriage arrangements, and Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac, are examples of the parents' absolute authority over the child. The Christian practice of infant baptism and dedication should remind parents that the children belong to God and not to us but the church continues to perpetuate the idea of dominance and control over children.

After the Protestant Reformation, religious education for youth meant the power to read the scriptures and eventually led to training to be English ladies and gentlemen. For 200 years, education emphasized the training of the intellect, the discipline of the mind, and the teaching of students to reason. Knowledge gained was not as important as exercising the mind; the attitudes, interests, and emotions of students were secondary. Self-expression was ignored and creativity left out.[1]

Traditional beliefs concerning religious education in Black Baptist churches have focused on the idea that education was the storing of knowledge, and training in the process of thinking. From the Sunday school nursery to the adult bible class, the emphasis in Black Baptist churches has been primarily scripture memorization, interpretation, and reasoning. The tools used to measure Christian growth were limited to one's ability to quote scripture and interpret what the scripture meant in everyday life. Education, in the modern sense, deals with the whole of life and trains more than the intellect. It trains the affections, aspirations, appreciations, and loyalties of its students; it trains the heart as much as the head.[2]

Traditional methods of religious education used in

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[1]George Betts, The New Program of Religious Education (New York: Abingdon Press, 1921), 34.

[2]Betts, 37.

National Baptist churches that train the head and not the heart are inadequate. They will not get the job done of preparing our young people to fight the evils of an urban environment. Programs of religious education practiced in many Black Baptists churches consist of denominationally approved books and resources, church sponsored programs, and revivals which benefit church members and their families. These traditional methods of ministry may work well when used with children who were born into a religious family setting but are incompatible with the culture of inner city youth.

Black churches often use authoritative methods of teaching that compel others to conform but never to believe. These methods force inner city children to sit and conform to a rigid schedule of scripture memorization and bible interpretation but will not hold their attention. Even Jesus broke with the traditional methods of teaching by authoritative means. The methods used by the pharisees were to quote what the rabbi said and have the congregation to memorize the scriptures. Jesus had the highest regard for scriptures but was against the methods by which they were learned. He encouraged and stimulated his disciples to think for themselves and often used parables to motivate them in solving problems. Jesus was concerned about the conformity of his followers but he never forced it.[3]

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[3]Findley B. Edge, Teaching for Results (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), 8.

Letty Russell defines Christian education as the participation in Christ's invitation to all people to join in God's mission of restoring persons to their true humanity. In Christian education Christ and his spirit are the teachers who lead and instruct to maturity and the educator accepts the position of cooperative partnership with the educated.[4] Christian education is missionary education by definition because it is participation in the invitation of Christ to join in God's mission in the world. The mission belongs to God, not the church; God does the sending. God sends God's Son, God's spirit, and God's church into the world to witness to God's actions of salvation.[5]

The purpose of Christian education is the celebration of God's acts of salvation by which God has saved God's people and set them free. To participate in Christ's invitation to all to join in God's mission of restoring others to their true humanity is to participate in an invitation to freedom and the celebration of that freedom. A celebration of freedom is a continual and universal "jubilee."[6]

Traditional ways of teaching in African American Baptist churches have lacked methods that induce excitement and spontaneity. Children are bored with methods of learning where the head is filled but the heart is empty. Most classes

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[4]Russell, Christian Education, 28-35.

[5]Russell, Christian Education, 38.

[6]Russell, Christian Education, 135.

taught in National Baptist churches are information centered instead of excitement centered. The children are bored with classes that require them to sit each week and listen to teachers who are bored with teaching. Boredom is often a product of repetition and children want a change in their learning schedule and an atmosphere that creates excitement. Young people are taught through television that communication consists of color, visual images, words, motion, and emotion; older adults are taught to communicate through words and should not expect the children to identify with such methods.[7]

Innovative Methods

Christian living should be the primary objective of religious education programs in the inner city rather than scripture memorization. One does not learn a Christian ideal until he/she experiences it in everyday living. Black churches must employ methods of observation that measure the extent to which our students are learning biblical principles. One such method of observation employed at the youth center was in teaching the children to forgive. When fights broke out between children, we would separate them, allow them to calm their emotions, and remember what they had learned about repentance and forgiveness. If the child who started the fight was able to say "I'm sorry" and the child who was victimized could say "I forgive you" and their friendship

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[7]Richard P. Schowalter, Igniting a New Generation of Believers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 18.

could continue, then the Christian principles of repentance and forgiveness would have truly been learned.

The objectives of Christian teachers should include the categories of knowledge, inspiration, and conduct response. The knowledge aim is one where the student is led to a better understanding of the meaning and facts of the bible. The inspirational aim leads the student to an acceptance of a general Christian attitude or ideal. A proper conduct response leads the student to express an ideal or attitude in his/her everyday life. Proper conduct response in Christian living should be the goal of all Christian teaching.[8]

Religious education, during the time of Jesus, was concerned with the outward acts of obedience to the law. Jesus led the thinking of the Jews away from outward acts to the inner thoughts and attitudes of the soul. He was against rigid emphasis placed upon sabbath observances, fasting, and ceremonial cleanliness. This type of education preserved religious orthodoxy but led to a cold formalism where the observance of doctrines was more important than human suffering.[9]

One does not learn a Christian ideal until he/she experiences it and expresses it in everyday life. The teacher must be aware of the danger in relying upon words to describe religious experience while omitting the importance of having

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[8]Edge, 8.

[9]Edge, 8.

lived the actual experience. Too many classes end in just talk with no inducement to action.[10] Teachers should provide the conditions necessary for the Holy Spirit to do its work in the lives of young people.

At the youth center, we encouraged the children to give hugs to one another as a gesture of love and forgiveness. They were constantly tested as to how they would handle real life situations according to biblical principles. They were encouraged to bring in testimonies each day of things they observed in everyday life which indicated that God's Word was indeed true. The children began looking for evidence in their life situations each day which demonstrated the love and protection of God in spite of the evil that surrounded them. They had no problem bringing their concerns and prayer needs to the counselors and youth ministers who taught them to trust and believe God for deliverance. However, trusting and believing God for deliverance involves more than just praying; faith without works or corresponding action is dead. We taught our children that the action of study was required of them if they were praying to make an "A" on the exam at school, work was required of them if they were praying for money to buy clothes, giving unto others was required if they expected others to give unto them.

I discovered that African American inner city children had no difficulty in identifying with a religion that stresses

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[10]Edge, 16.

action because their very survival depended upon their actions. Inner city children are wise and very shrewd when it comes to survival. Many of these children are making decisions about life at the age of ten that most of us don't make until we are thirty. It is unrealistic to expect these children to respond to cute little stories about Jesus being born in a manger and the disappointing story of his defeat and destruction on a cross without giving them some idea of victory or an image of success.

The teaching and preaching at ReHope emphasized the resurrection of Jesus rather than the crucifixion. The resurrection offered the young people an image of power and victory over death they so desperately needed. Inner city children are seeking some type of power and ability to have control over their lives. They are looking for freedom from oppression and are willing to follow any system that provides an image of success and victory over poverty and the miseries of life. They understand, even better than many adults, that faith involves action. Unfortunately, some may resort to illegal actions in order to achieve financial gain.

Separating what we believe from what we do has greatly harmed our credibility as Christians and has left room for all sorts of religious sects to vie for the hearts and souls of our urban youth. Works set true Christians apart from pretenders. The urban sub-culture that has grown around Malcom X and groups like the Muslims are all evidence of our

peoples' search for some truth to believe in and a religion that emphasizes action and not just rhetoric. It is not necessary to replace Christianity with a new gospel or clever distortion. But, it is necessary that we begin to live out our faith to its fullest.[11]

"The gospel is a physical event; the cross was a physical event; people stood there and witnessed the evidence of Christ's love. Love must be seen before it can be embraced."[12] When Jesus was asked by the disciples of John to give proof of his messianic claims, he did so by his actions. He said to go and tell John not only what they heard but also what they saw: "the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." We, as a church, must be willing to prove our love by our actions.

We must provide our young people with positive alternatives for financial gain and economic success. In many of our inner cities the church is the only viable institution left that is capable of providing jobs for our youth and offering them an opportunity to develop as leaders. At the youth center, we were able to provide jobs for many of our inner city teenagers and were able to help them develop leadership skills needed to become responsible adults.

The most popular method used at the youth center for

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[11]Perkins, 69.

[12]Perkins, 70.

teaching Christian principles was music. The "hip-hop" and "rap" style of music, that is so popular in the inner city, really caught the attention of the children and was able to motivate them in learning Christian principles and participating in worship services. Music that holds the attention of young people today should be upbeat, easy to learn and memorize; it should invoke the use of hands and feet which makes the songs participatory and more meaningful.[13]

Today's children have replaced childhood games with television and video which creates a frenzied activity that has a tendency to rev up the child in an artificial way, almost the way a stimulant or amphetamine might.[14] The associate minister of the congregation that I pastored in the military recently tested this theory on the young people attending vacation bible school. She was having difficulty keeping the children interested and controlling their hyper-active tendencies. I suggested showing them a popular movie and using each significant event in the plot as a catalyst to teach a biblical principle or Christian value. She used the movie "The Nutty Professor" with Eddie Murphy to not only get and keep the attention of the children but teach them the golden rule of "doing unto others as we would have them do unto us."

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[13]Schowalter, 39.

[14]Marie Winn, Children without Childhood (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 76.

The church must recognize the tendency of its children to be "hyper-active" and utilize this energy in a positive way. A lively worship service that includes lots of singing, dancing, and creative drama will get and keep the attention of inner city children and provide an outlet for their physical and emotional energy.

In order for inner city children to overcome the problem of low self-esteem, their education must include and emphasize multi-cultural instruction which would have the following advantages:

1. It builds and strengthens a sense of self identity.
2. Knowledge about other cultural and racial groups is increased.
3. It provides concrete examples of commonalities between people.
4. It promotes a deep respect for social and cultural differences.
5. Our awareness of the obstacles that prevent appreciation of some groups and the barriers that keep groups of people apart is increased.
6. It builds and strengthens skills that improve communication between cultural and racial groups.
7. An awareness of the world as one family with people working and struggling together is developed.[15]

Multi-Cultural Education

The word multi-cultural brings fear and a lot of suspicion to many churches in the city because of a reluctance to change their traditions and their unwillingness to share the power and authority of leadership. The church should feel at home with change rather than feel threatened by it. We learn from the New Testament that when God's people were

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[15]Johnson, 256.

caught up in the midst of change, they were most responsive to the gospel. The gospel brought New Testament believers together in unity in spite of their cultural changes and differences. Great care was given to ensure that certain practices of the Jews were not forced upon the Gentiles such as circumcision; this was clearly a demonstration of respect for the cultural differences of others and a willingness to be united in the midst of diverse cultural practices and beliefs.[16] Black inner city churches must recognize the cultural diversity of their communities and make recommendations to accept the people as they are and incorporate them into the life of the church.

I have prepared the following, "Rites of Passage" ceremony as an example of what can possibly be used in a National Baptist church setting or any church that ministers to African Americans in the inner city where the youth have adopted a culture unique to their environment. The language used in the ceremony is a reflection of the "hip-hop" sub-culture of African American youth in the inner city and the Christian principles of family life found in the bible. The liturgy is designed as an affirmation event for young African American males age 13 but it can also include females. Portions of the ceremony that relate to both boys and girls are labeled both and those that are gender specific will indicate either boys or girls. Participants in the ceremony

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[16]DuBose, 129.

should be baptized members of the church who have accepted Christ as their Savior. There is no set age limit when the act of confessing Christ as one's Savior is recognized in the Baptist Church. But, for the purpose of resignifying the baptismal event as an affirmation of entering adult Christian life, I have chosen the age 13.

Although the liturgy can be used for both boys and girls, I would suggest that the ceremonies be separate because of the emphasis and the need for bonding between African American men and boys. This need for bonding is illustrated in the closing part of the ceremony where fathers give their charge to their sons and the sons pay tribute to their fathers. I do recognize the need for the affirming and bonding of fathers and mothers with both sons and daughters but for the purpose of identifying one problem in the African American family and offering one solution, I've chosen to focus on the male population of the church.

The word "obedience" is the key word that explains the purpose of this liturgy. It signifies that the young men (or women) of the church have reached an age where they are ready to seriously consider the teachings of Christ and are willing to follow them as an act of obedience. The title of the ceremony is "Keeping it Real" which is a hip-hop way of saying yes, I will obey and conform to the biblical principles of love and respect for others. This ritual not only acknowledges the baptism of young people but also recognizes

their decision to follow Christ and commitment to live responsible and productive lives.

Some questions in the liturgy are designed to evoke a commitment from young people to love and forgive members of their family and love their neighbors as they love themselves. These questions are to encourage young people to respect their parents and every human being as belonging to the family of God. Questions in the liturgy that evoke a commitment to refrain from polluting the earth and destroying property are designed to encourage young people to respect God's earth and protect their communities. It is the duty of the church to teach our young people the responsibilities of living in a giving and sharing community where the well being of each member depends upon the actions of the other.[17]

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[17]1 Cor. 12:13-26.

CHAPTER 6

Rites of Passage: "Keeping it Real"

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE

Minister

It is believed that David was a mere teenager when he took on the awesome responsibility of facing a giant named Goliath. David was victorious because he learned how to use the greatest weapon given to us by God, the weapon of "faith." The king of Israel recognized the "God given talents" of David and placed him in a position of leadership that eventually lead to a revolutionized government. We acknowledge and recognize today a group of young men (or women) who, like David, have faced and will continue to face some awesome giants in life. But, through their faith in God and their God given talents, they can also be victorious.

PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES

Your baptism into water recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit which baptizes you into the body of Christ, which is the church. We stand in recognition today that you are a part of the church as the body of Christ, the family of God, and the community of all Christians.

We are called to conform to the image of God and allow others the freedom to also conform to that image. We believe that the image of God is love, therefore, we are called to love our neighbor, as we love ourselves.

As you depart from your childhood days of aimless wonder, we, as a church, charge you to live your lives in obedience to God and in responsibility to one another. If you would be followers of Jesus Christ, you must deny yourselves, take up your crosses and become instruments of God's love.

In doing so, I now call _____ to respond to the following questions:

Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

(Both) Yes.

Do you renounce all worldly claims and aspirations that do not glorify God and in obedience to Christ, will you take up your cross and follow Christ?

(Both) Yes, I will follow Jesus.

Will you keep it real?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real for yourself and not allow hate to overcome you, injustice to discourage you, nor greed to motivate you?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real for your family by respecting your father and mother?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you pray for the strength to forgive them if they have hurt you?

(Both) Yes, I will pray.

Will you keep it real for your brothers and sisters by teaching them the sanctity of life and by living your life as an example of love?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real for all women and girls; will you respect them as your equals and not treat them as objects to satisfy your greed or lusts?

(Boys) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real for all boys and men by refusing to use your body as an instrument for manipulation, for personal or

material gain?

(Girls) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real for your community by committing yourself to building it up and not tearing it down?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real for all human life and not commit any act of violence upon another as a means of revenge or a method to receive material gain?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real for God's earth by refusing to pollute it, dump waste and trash upon it, and disfigure it with obscenity?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Will you keep it real by loving your neighbor as you love yourself and following the example of Jesus, will you share your faith with others?

(Both) Yes, I will keep it real.

Repeat the Great Commission, Matthew 28: 18-20.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Father's charge to Sons (Mother's charge to daughters) Each father/mother will give words of advice from the bible or life experiences.

Son's tribute to fathers (or daughter's tribute to mothers) should include words of thanks.

CLOSING PRAYER AND BENEDICTION

(This formal ritual can be followed by a typical festive African American meal prepared at the church or brought from home by church members).

I believe this liturgy will have a positive impact on the worship service in terms of unifying the children with adults who often feel that young people have no desire to participate in the life of the church. Adults have agreed with and adopted the principles of love and respect set forth in the liturgy, therefore, the children's commitment to these

principles should establish a common bond between them.

CHAPTER 7

Ministry of Youth

Empowering Youth to Do Ministry

Organizations today (including the church) have very little trust in the delegation of responsibility and authority; this does not produce leaders. We cannot produce leaders by sitting around talking to them. They must demonstrate their leadership qualities in action. Teachers must learn how to be facilitators of the learning process; they must be active leaders but remain impersonal in order for the leadership qualities to develop in others.[1] Jesus, who I believe was the greatest facilitator of learning, taught his disciples by giving them an opportunity to act upon what they had heard. The disciples failed their mid-term exam when they panicked in the midst of a storm on the sea of Galilee. Jesus rebuked the wind, calmed the sea, then asked his disciples, "Where is your faith?"[2] Jesus wanted to know why they could not do what he had done for he taught them how to pray and believe they could have whatever they say if they did not doubt.

We must teach our young people, in the inner city, Christian principles but give them an opportunity to use those principles in solving their own problems. My experiences in working with inner city youth have revealed to me that young

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[1] Stephen Jones, 297.

[2] Luke 8:22-25.

people are the best solution to their own problems. They can develop innovative methods for eliminating violence and crime in their neighborhoods if given the proper tools and opportunities for leadership. Young people in our inner cities are in need of love, encouragement, respect, and an opportunity to "show what they can do." The church can show respect for inner city youth by inviting them to participate in the life of the church and asking them, "What can you do for us?" instead of telling them, "This is what we can do for you."

The responsibility of clergy is not to create ministry but discover ministry by observing the work of God, the "Holy Spirit," in the lives of the people. According to Leonardo Boff's conceptualization of the church, the power of Christ resides not in certain members only, but in the totality of God's people. He defines church as a basic community where the power to do ministry is generated from the "foundation up" rather than the "steeple down."[3] Clergy and adult leaders can avoid alienating young people from the life of the church by sharing with them the responsibility for doing ministry and edifying the rest of the congregation.

I can remember how I felt as a child growing up in a small community church in the South. I wanted to play my drums and my brother wanted to play his sax in the local church. We

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[3]Leonardo Boff, Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), 25.

were met with opposition from the pastor who believed the only sacred instrument, approved by God, was a Baldwin piano. My mother suggested we take piano lessons and adjust our musical gifts to conform with the religious culture and traditions of the church. We felt alienated, frustrated, and eventually left the church to form a rhythm and blues band.

A night club owner across town heard about our music and offered to buy us new instruments and give a gig to play twice a week. Since our parents would not allow it, the group broke up and our feelings toward the church, parents, and all institutions of authority grew increasingly negative. Young people, today, have become negative and apathetic towards the church and institutions of society that will not consider them a voice to be heard. They are leaving religious organizations that will not allow them the opportunity to express their faith in ways generic to their culture.

Some churches are afraid to allow young people the freedom to worship and serve God in ways generic to their culture for fear that the church will become too secular. This fear of the church becoming secularized is rooted in a fear that the church will shift from the dominate rule of the "sacral" to the dominate rule of the "non-sacral." [4]

Jesus taught us that the day would come when there would no longer be any "holy hills" or special sacred orders through which God works; " Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when

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[4]DuBose, 118.

true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth."[5] God works through all of life and secularization frees us from traditional ties and provides a new sense of liberty and openness that creates the climate for the free exchange of ideas.

According to the biblical mandate, we must honor (respect) our children and our childness if we expect to participate in the kingdom of God.[6] As a church, we can help inner city children to overcome their low self esteem by giving them respect and recognizing them as unique and separate persons of worth. Regarding all children with respect and recognizing the childness in us is fundamental to our salvation and vital for human community.[7]

Jesus welcomed children in order to teach them and bless them in a loving healing way. Jesus placed children in the center in order to transform the present with the future that God makes new. We should respond to children in our religious communities as fully human and worthy of respect. When we welcome children, we welcome the divine in our midst.[8] Biblical stories concerning Jesus and the children illustrate how Jesus changed earthly expectations by teaching that the

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[5]John 4:21-24.

[6]Matt. 18:1-5.

[7]Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, Regarding Children (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 22.

[8]Anderson and Johnson, 20.

meek will inherit the earth, the last shall be first, and children have full membership in the realm of God.

National Baptist churches should allow young people full membership in the church by recognizing that their gifts and ability create solutions to their own problems. I am amazed how young people can generate ideas when asked what they would do if they were in charge of running the youth program of the church.

Recognizing and Developing Leaders

The greatest resources available in solving the problems of our inner cities are the young people who live there. Every major movement in the history of mankind was either led or supported in a significant way by young people. The Israeli occupation of Palestine, led by Joshua, was primarily a youth supported movement. The children who came out of the wilderness with Joshua did not adopt the fears and unbelief of their parents and were more than willing to enter the promise land and fight for it.

The Protestant Reformation can be classified as a youth movement where young people under the age of 30 were the most active in promoting the ideas of Martin Luther. The Industrial Revolution of 1760 became a youth movement when factories in the city opened their doors to teenagers willing and eager to leave the farm in order to earn more money.[9] The

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[9]Merton P. Strommen, Bridging the Gap (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), 14.

Civil Rights Movement received national attention when Martin Luther King allowed the children to participate. In Birmingham, Alabama, young people took the front lines of the battlefield for freedom and were met by police dogs and fire hoses. This unfortunate incident touched the hearts of this nation and motivated the President of the United States to send federal troops into Alabama in support of peaceful demonstrations.

Many consider the youth of today to be "rebels without a cause." Teenagers of the 1960s and 1970s rebelled against the system in favor of some ideology but young people today don't seem to have an ideology. They expect a lot but they are not fighting for anything; they are just there.[10] Many believe that young people engage in violent acts against each other because there are no defined problem areas that can unite them together in a movement that provides an opportunity for them to vent their frustrations. The church should do every thing possible, not just to minister to inner city youth, but to include them in ministering to others.

Participation, as a method of Christian education, should be practiced more in National Baptist churches. Participation, in the sense of having a share in something and being an actual part of it, is an indispensable method of Christian education. Children, as well as adults, can be an actual part of the life of Christ as it is lived out in the

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[10]Posterski, 11.

witness and service of the congregation. Children learn by being a part of and having a share in the work that the congregation performs as the hands and feet of Christ in the world.[11] Traditional methods of Christian education are built upon an hierarchical structure where the minister or teacher tells others what to do and the students have little or no opportunity for genuine participation in decision making, education or worship.[12] This can only hinder the development of a child's leadership abilities.

At ReHope, we tried to make each child feel important and gave children who demonstrated a reasonable amount of leadership potential, the opportunity to participate in the decision making process. Older children were promoted to positions of group leader when they showed evidence of responsibility and desire to excel. This gave them a sense of pride in their ability to accomplish something meaningful in a society that has labeled them losers and misfits. We were able to recognize the value of each child as a potential leader and contributor to the overall success of the youth center program. The majority of our summer camp workers were teenagers who were paid by the state under a federally funded summer jobs program. These teenagers were responsible for serving meals, supervising playground and recreational activities, providing clerical support, and assisting in the

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[11]Russell, Christian Education, 100.

[12]Russell, Christian Education, 102.

overall upkeep of the job site. Many of these youth workers became valuable role models for the younger children who desperately needed someone to look up to and identify with.

The many gifts and talents of our teenage workers were valuable assets to the success of the program. Those children at the youth center who showed evidence of evangelistic gifts and a strong desire for leadership were given an opportunity to share their faith with other children in the neighborhood. They were trained how to witness to other children and awards were given to those who brought others to enroll in the program. This created an atmosphere of excitement and the children understood that the words in the bible were not just for spiritual and intellectual stimulation but could actually come alive in them and bring about changes in their community. They witnessed other children giving their lives to Christ and gang bangers renouncing their allegiance to gangs. They saw, first hand, how preaching the gospel made a difference in cleaning up their neighborhoods of drug houses and prostitution. The young people were excited to see that faith could actually come alive and not be just talked about from the pulpit or sung about from the choir loft.

CHAPTER 8

Summary and Conclusions

African American inner city congregations can avoid a lot of needless conflict if they recognize the norms and values of their communities, understand the narrative history, and adapt the ministry of the church to meet the needs of the people. The norms, values, and traditions of the church will often clash with those of the community. Black churches must be willing to change those norms, and traditions that serve no purpose in meeting the needs of the community they serve or risk the possibility of alienating a community of young people. There are some norms and traditions that should probably change as the environment changes.

Young people are invaluable to the church as a resource to help bring about change because they will be more in touch with a changing environment and have less to give up in terms of tradition. Any church would be foolish not to include young people in its leadership and share with them the goals and mission of the church. National Baptist churches are filled with "old timers" who have built a wall keeping young people outside the circles of leadership. This type of behavior could possibly lead to the church becoming extinct in the future because young people tend to leave institutions in which they feel unwanted, and have no voice in making decisions. Young people who belong to such institutions are often very discouraged and will either join other churches

where their voices can be heard or give up on all religious institutions and become "backsliders." My definition of a backslider is one who withdraws fellowship from the local church and no longer practices the Christian faith in terms of prayer and devotion to God. There are many young "prodigal sons and daughters" who have left inner city churches because they feel unwelcome and consider the church another institution designed to force them to adopt a culture they did not create.

Church traditions and ideologies that exclude our youth and place little value in their contributions should be re-examined. Human resources are the most valuable resources to any congregation and if young people can identify with a cause they can become committed to that cause and will stand a better chance of remaining with a congregation during times of change and adversity. Natonal Baptist church leaders must put forth an effort to reconcile differences with inner city youth in terms of worship styles, church music, methods of teaching, and religious practices that have nothing to do with following Christ. Today's youth are asking questions such as, "Why is Sunday the only set aside day of the week for family worship and why must our Bible school be called a vacation for one week each summer?" Church leaders must be willing to liberate themselves from certain religious practices that do not fit the life style of inner city youth and do not contribute to their Christian educaton. Liberation from traditions of the

past could possibly lead to reconciliation with today's youth whose ideas are needed to build a stronger church in the future.

The church that wants to do ministry in the inner city should form a partnership with that city as a way of providing the skills and expertise needed for growth.[1] Many National Baptist churches are able to provide the manpower needed to launch programs in the inner city that can help young people develop positive attitudes about life. But, more than programs can be provided in terms of personal relationships. Black inner city children need role models who they can look up to. These role models would provide a flesh and blood type of relationship with them. The basketball and football players they admire on television are not there to give them a hug or wipe away a tear; the rap musicians and video stars are not around to give advise when they are in deep trouble. We need Christians who care enough about inner city children to adopt them for a day or a week, take them home and give them a good dose of love and hospitality.

Strong Christian families are the best role models for young people who have dysfunctional family backgrounds and have no trust in adult authority. Young people need to know that the world is not always painful and there are "safety zones" in Christian families who live and practice the law of

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[1]John J. Vincent, _Starting All Over Again_ (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981), 55.

love. Strong Christian families should develop flesh and blood relationships with inner city children in order to provide an opportunity for "hands on experiences" with Christian love in action.

Partnerships with inner city children should also be encouraged and developed by churches in the suburbs. There are many White and Black congregations outside the inner city anxious to get involved with a valid ministry in the city and utilize money set aside for "home missions." Human resources can also be provided by suburban churches in volunteers who are willing to work with inner city children and provide leadership in programs that meet their needs. These volunteer experiences can be mutually beneficial in providing positive role models for inner city children and fulfilling the desire of many suburbanites to do ministry.

While serving as Director of Youth Ministries at the ReHope Youth Center, Kansas City, Kansas, I discovered that contributions made by those considered "outsiders" proved to be invaluable. At the youth center, we utilized the services of many White suburban college students and educators who heard about our efforts to reach inner city youth. They volunteered to come into the inner city and participated in our tutoring program. The children enjoyed working with this group of young para-professionals and were impressed to learn that others, outside the inner city, were concerned about their welfare. Although many volunteers came from outside the

inner city to help, I was careful to maintain leadership from within. The children needed role models they could identify with, making decisions that they understood were relative to their culture.

National Baptist churches, that are financially stable, are able to create jobs that can reduce the high rate of unemployment in the inner city. They can open day care centers, nursing homes, homeless shelters, and even schools that can hire inner city residents. Churches that are not financially strong can still provide work sites that qualify for federal and state funds to hire teenagers during the summer and help welfare recipients get off the dependency roles.

The inner city is in need of the "agape" type of love spoken of in the New Testament. Agape love is impersonal but compassionate and demands nothing in return. The source of agape love is wholly the giver and not the one who receives; it is the ideal type of love for the inner city because it meets the needs of others with no questions asked.[2]

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[2]DuBose, 113.

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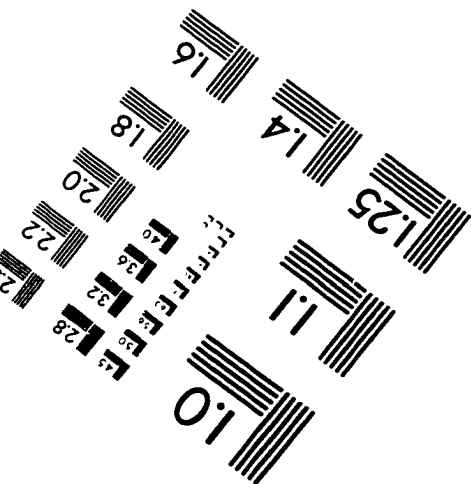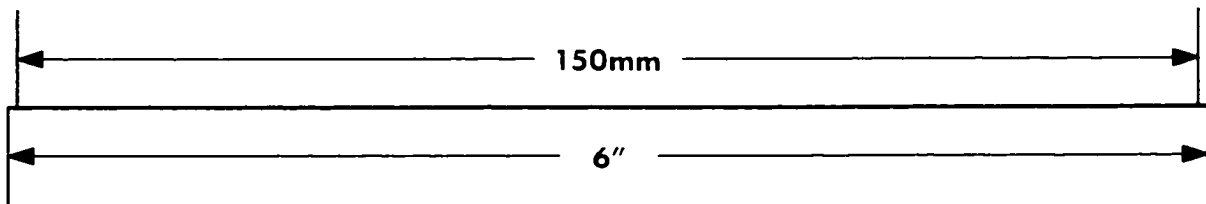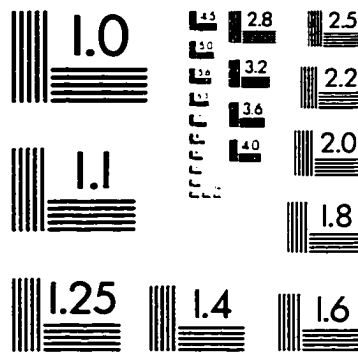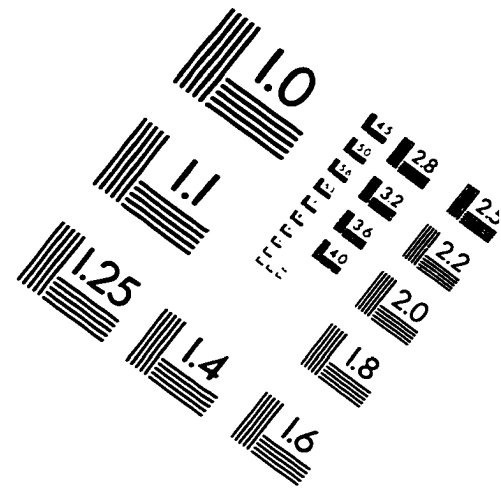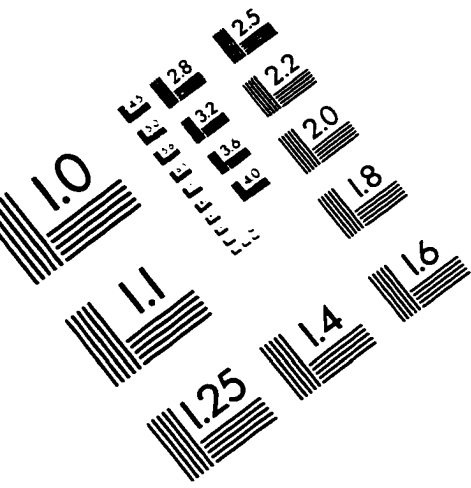
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